

Gulf and Caribbean Research

Volume 22 | Issue 1

2010

Obituaries - Rezneat Milton Darnell, Jr. (1924-2009) and Royal Dallas Sutkus (1920-2009)

Molly Marie Darnell

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DOI: 10.18785/gcr.2201.10

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Recommended Citation

Darnell, M. M. and H. L. Bart Jr. 2010. Obituaries - Rezneat Milton Darnell, Jr. (1924-2009) and Royal Dallas Sutkus (1920-2009). Gulf and Caribbean Research 22 (1): 77-78.
Retrieved from <http://aquila.usm.edu/gcr/vol22/iss1/10>

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OBITUARY

REZNEAT MILTON DARNELL, JR.

Rezneat Milton Darnell, Jr., well-known and respected ecologist and marine biologist, died on 22 December, 2009 in



Rez Darnell working on his book in his office at home, spring 2005.

Minneapolis, MN after a brief illness with pneumonia and suspected lung cancer.

Rez was born in Memphis, TN on 14 October, 1924. His parents were Rezneat

Milton Darnell, Sr. and Matilda Millen Darnell.

Dr. Darnell was Professor of Oceanography at Texas A&M University from 1968 until his retirement in 1995 as Professor Emeritus.

Darnell graduated from Southwestern College (now known as Rhodes College) in Memphis, TN with a Bachelor's degree in Zoology in 1946. He received his Master's degree in Biology & Genetics from Rice University in Houston in 1948 and his Ph.D. in Ecology from the University of Minnesota in 1953. Before coming to Texas A&M, Darnell served three years as Instructor at Tulane University in New Orleans, LA and 13 years as Assistant Professor at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI.

Dr. Darnell published numerous scientific papers on the ecology of the Gulf of Mexico. His last work, *The American Sea: A Natural History of the Gulf of Mexico*, soon to be published by the Texas A&M Press, is a comprehensive book on the ecology of the Gulf of Mexico and is eagerly awaited by colleagues across the nation. His many graduate students have praised his lectures and his ability to clearly and concisely explain the complex environmental problems of our planet.

Dr. Linda Pequegnat, former Research Scientist in the Oceanography Department at Texas A&M and a friend and colleague of Dr. Darnell's says, "Rez has been called 'The Great Synthesizer' because of his ability to take detached scientific information and organize it into meaningful overviews that explain the 'big picture' of ecological relationships in the natural world. He was also a 'Renaissance Man' with extensive knowledge and experiences in such diverse areas as music, languages, and history – in addition to his vast scientific knowledge. His forthcoming book, soon to be published by the Texas A&M Press, on the history, biology, ecology, and management of the Gulf of Mexico pulls together more information about the Gulf of Mexico than has ever before been amassed in one Volume."

Dr. Darnell was preceded in death by his parents and by his older brother, Rowland Jones Darnell. He is survived by his loving and caregiver daughter, Molly Marie Darnell of Minneapolis, MN, his brother J. Millen Darnell of Memphis, TN, his first wife Jeanne Hellberg Darnell of Minneapolis, MN, and many nieces and nephews including James Darnell, serving his second tour of duty in Afghanistan.

– Molly Marie Darnell

ROYAL DALLAS SUTTKUS

Royal D. Suttikus, or "Sut", as he was affectionately known to family and friends, holds a special place in southeastern ichthyology, having described a significant component of the region's ichthyofauna. On 5 January, 2010, the ichthyological and broader biological communities were awakened to the news that Royal D. Suttikus had passed away one week earlier (28 December 2009) surrounded by family in Decatur, Georgia, less than six months shy of his 90 birthday. Over a professional career spanning 65 years, he established a legacy that will serve the biological communities for many years to come. His great skill and his insatiable appetite for field collecting are legendary. The collections he amassed—primarily fishes, but also important regional collections of plants, aquatic invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles, and mammals—constitute one of the most comprehensive, long-term records of biotic change in existence. The following account of his remarkable life is excerpted from an article currently

Royal D. Suttikus from the fall of 2000 in the fish collection that would soon be named in his honor.

in press in the journal *Copeia*.

Suttikus was born 11 May 1920 in Ballville, Ohio, the third of four children of John Albright Suttikus and Myna Louise Schultz Suttikus. Royal, as he was called as a boy, developed a love for natural history in early childhood. He hunted rabbits and pheasant with brother Merlin, and enjoyed birding, gathering wildflowers and collecting insects. He taught his friends about horned worms and hawk moths. He fished with his father below the hydrodam on the Sandusky River, catching white and black crappie. He caught small fish with his hands while searching for crayfish among slabs of rock. He recalls seeing redhorse



suckers spawning along the Sandusky River and shooting an Egyptian goose with a bow and arrow along the Grand River in Michigan. He read Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* while in high school.

Suttkus graduated from Fremont Ross High School in 1937 then worked in a celery garden for 2 years at a salary of \$0.25 cents per hour to earn money for college. In the fall of 1939, he enrolled in Michigan State University, eventually majoring in Wildlife Management.

Suttkus joined the R.O.T.C. at Michigan State, where he trained in field artillery. After earning his bachelor's degree, he enrolled in Officer's Commission School. When he finished his training, he was promoted to Second Lieutenant and attached to the 686th Field Artillery, an all African American battalion. His battalion went to South Wales in 1944 then crossed the English Channel to France, where his training was put to immediate use in the Battle of the Bulge.

After his discharge from the Army in June 1946, he was accepted to the graduate program in the School of Agriculture at Cornell University, where he studied under Edward Raney. He met his bride to be, Jeanne Elizabeth Robinson, while working for New York Fish and Game on Saranac Lake. They were married in December 1947. Son, Jayson, the first of three children, was born in Ithaca, NY, two years later in January 1949.

Suttkus accepted a faculty position in Zoology at Tulane University in the fall of 1950. Daughter, Ramona, was born in New Orleans in April 1951; daughter, Jan, was born in September 1954. Suttkus devoted his career at Tulane to collection building and studies of the taxonomy and natural history of specimens he collected. From 1963 to 1968, he was Principal Investigator of the NIH-funded, Environmental Biology Training Program, a summer program in which students received lectures and training while in the field collecting and preparing specimens of plants, invertebrates, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, and fossils. Additionally, he directed 24 graduate students during his career at Tulane University (10 M.S., 14 Ph.D.).

In 1963, Suttkus started a consulting business with his long-time Tulane colleague, the late Gerald E. Gunning. Their first contract was a survey of ten stations on the Pearl River near Bogalusa, Louisiana for a pulp and paper mill. The survey started with monthly samples in April

1963, then switched to quarterly (seasonal) collections a year later. A quarterly survey of eight stations on the upper Pearl River was initiated in 1973. Suttkus continued both surveys until 2005. A survey of the lower Alabama River started in 1969 and continued until 2000. A survey of the Red River near Alexandria, LA was established in 1976 and ended in 2002. Shorter-term surveys were conducted on the Perdido Bay System, Sabine River, Mississippi River and Calcasieu River. All of the collecting on these surveys was supervised by Suttkus and involved standardized gear, technique and environmental sampling. Suttkus also collected marine organisms during oceanic cruises in the Gulf of Mexico, Indian Ocean, off the coasts of Peru and Venezuela, and around the Galapagos Islands. All of the specimens collected (fishes and any amphibians, reptiles, mussels, and decapods that happened to be collected) were preserved and ultimately cataloged into Tulane's natural history collections.

Suttkus published 125 papers during his career, including 54 of which deal directly with fish taxonomy and systematics, 41 on various aspects of fish life history and/or distribution, and 27 reports based on his fish monitoring surveys. As a sign of his taxonomic breadth, 11 of his papers deal with mammals, three deal with crayfishes, and one deals with freshwater mussels. Among his systematic and taxonomic contributions are descriptions of 35 new fish species, 29 of which are freshwater species largely confined to the southeastern United States.

Suttkus's greatest contributions to southeastern biology were his collections. He built the Tulane fish collection on a foundation of just two mounted fish specimens left over from an early exhibit museum. By 1968, the fish collection had grown to a size of just over two million specimens, overfilling its space on the main Tulane campus. Later that year, the fish collection, along with birds, mammals and vertebrate fossil collections left over from the early exhibit museum, plus the thousands of specimens of plants, amphibians, reptiles, mammals and fossils amassed by Suttkus and students in the Environmental Biology Training Program, were moved to a 500 acre parcel of land on the Mississippi River

near Belle Chasse, LA, which Tulane had acquired from the U.S. Navy. The land, which had served as an ammunition storage depot during WWII, eventually became the F. Edward Hebert "Riverside" Research Laboratories. The collections became part of what was initially called the Systematics and Environmental Biology Laboratory. In 1976, Suttkus convinced the Tulane administration to formally recognize the collections at Riverside as the Tulane University Museum of Natural History, and to appoint him as the Museum's first Director.

Suttkus officially retired from Tulane University in 1990. In fall 2000, a jubilee celebration was held in New Orleans to honor Suttkus's 50 years of service to Tulane University and his contributions to southeastern biology. At a special closing ceremony held under a tent beside the fish collection, the Dean of Arts and Sciences read a proclamation from the President, Faculty and Administrators of Tulane University, officially renaming the Tulane Fish Collection, the Royal D. Suttkus Fish Collection, and granting Suttkus the title of Emeritus Curator of Fishes.

Suttkus continued collecting and depositing specimens in the fish collection until just before Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in August 2005. Suttkus's home near the beach in Ocean Springs, Mississippi was flooded and badly damaged by the high winds and storm surge that accompanied the hurricane. He lost nearly all of his possessions, including his field notes and most of his library. What little remains of his library is now part of the Royal D. Suttkus Fish Collection.

Since the hurricane, Suttkus and Jeanne had been living in an apartment in Atlanta, where he continued to publish his research. Suttkus had also been battling prostate cancer. His health took a downward turn in early December 2009. However, family members say that his mind was clear and his spirits were high until shortly before he died. He is survived by his wife Jeanne, son Jayson, daughters Ramona and Jan and their families, brother Hazen and numerous extended family members.

– Henry L. Bart, Jr.